VILA RECÔNCAVO

[Town Life]

463
26
3

based on what the fishermen claim to have caught, for the fish is not weighed and the price is based on a low average price per kilogram for all types of fish. As a rule fish is sold by the can and not by weight. The one man in town who buys fish for his icehouse usually buys "by the eye," that is, by estimation of how many kilograms he is getting. If anything, however, the above figures err by underestimation.

463
226
227

The life of the fisherman is a rugged one, and his schedule follows the incoming and outgoing tides. There are six types of nets most commonly used: the circular casting net (tarrafa) and the deep net (rêde de fundo) or drag net (rêde de arrasto) to catch shrimp; the ressaca and abaladeira, the former for xangó and the latter for sardines and tainha (a small sardine-like fish); and the calão and calãozinho for the larger fish. These are the most popular nets, but there also exist several others used with less frequency, such as the arraieira, a net used only to catch the arraia, or skate fish; the pesqueiro, a pole-and-net trap to catch all kinds of large fish; the caçoeira, to catch the caçao and other very large fish; and the jererê, a small basketlike net used by women and children along the shore to catch small fish and crabs. In addition, a long line with many hooks on it (grosseira), baited to catch large fish,

226

is used. The hook and line is very seldom used. Fish poison is employed. Tingui, a toxic plant, is mashed and scattered on the water in the mangue at low tide, and it stupefies the caramurú and miroró, two inhabitants of the mangue.

The favorite shrimp banks are directly in front of the town of Vila Recôncavo, at the mouth of the river which empties into the Bay of All Saints. The preferred time to use the circular casting net for shrimp is early on a windless morning, during the hours of full tide when the incoming surge has ended and the outgoing current has not yet started. The shrimp fleet seen from the heights of the town presents a scene of utmost tranquility, for there is little action involved other than the quick throwing out and the slow pulling in and folding of the net. Tarrafa fishing is a one-man job. The man paddles a canoe out to the area where the shrimp are usually to be found, which in this case is a large submerged rock on the edge of the river channel, around which shrimp are numerous. Arriving there the fisherman ships his paddle and begins to cast his net, standing in the stern of the canoe. As a rule there are between twenty and thirty fishermen casting in and about the same place. The net is cone-shaped, the apex being

1

226
[435] costs about Cr$240,00 to make and lasts as long as ten years with good care.

• 227 The drag net, or deep net, as it is sometimes called, is a much larger net used to catch shrimp. It is 360 feet long, 168 feet wide, and has 420 feet of rope on one end and 480 [435] feet on the other. The top is equipped with wooden floats, and the bottom with lead weights. Such a net costs about [422] Cr$4.000,00 and is expensive to keep up, for it is easily torn [441] on submerged objects because of its size and weight. There are only six of them in the town; most of them belong to the merchants, who are the only ones who can afford the upkeep.

226
[461] Fishing with this net is very complicated and requires the services of at least ten men and two canoes, one large and one small. The owner seldom goes fishing. Instead, a master (mestre) is in charge of the operation, and the others in the crew are called "boys" (mocos). One of these is the baixador whose work is done standing in the water. His is an unpleasant job, and he runs the constant risk of being bitten by crabs, stung by large jellyfish, and cut by sharp shells on the bottom. The net is used only at the shrimp grounds already described, where the circular casting net is used, in front of the town. This net must also be used when the tide is at a standstill, because the current makes the heavy net unmanageable. The net is carried on the larger canoe which is paddled by six men, while four go in the smaller one. The canoes pause when they arrive at the customary point for launching the net, and almost everyone lights up a cigarette. There is usually some discussion among the fishermen in the various canoes as to who will launch his net first, but as a rule not more than four of the six nets are used on the same day. Since all four must be launched at exactly the same spot, there is an accepted order of first, second, third, and fourth. First yesterday is last today, each moving up one place each day. But if a crew is late in arriving the others will not wait very long, for the time for net work is short. Seldom do the four crews launch their nets more than twice in one morning. The last launching is called the "hard hard" (duradura), indicating the small returns obtained for such hard work. The first net to be launched usually catches the most shrimp.

[435] On a good day it is not unusual for the first crew to take in Cr$1.000,00 to Cr$2.000,00 worth of shrimp, especially if it [465] made two launchings. The method of paying the crew varies, but as a rule the owner takes between 40 and 50 per cent,

226 long and has ropes on each end 420 feet long. This net demands a large canoe. The usual size in use is 30 feet long.

226 427 Few of the fishermen own their own calão--most rent it from a merchant who has one. It is rented by the master on a long-term basis rather than for just one trip. It is said that the master "toma conta da rede," meaning that he not only is fishing with the net, but also repairs it and dyes it when needed. The owner of the net, who usually also owns the canoe and the paddles, receives 20 per cent of the profits of each 226 trip. The remainder is divided among the six men, although the master and baixador each receive one-third more than the [435] other four. Depending on how the fish are running, the calão may catch as much as Cr$1.000,00 to Cr$1.500,00 worth of fish per trip, or as little as Cr$120,00 worth. Two trips a day are made when the fishing is good. There are only eight of these nets in the town, and they are worth about Cr$1.500,00 apiece. The calãozinho is a smaller net of the same type, sometimes called the redinha, or little net. Although its op- [178] eration is almost the same as that of the larger net, it re- [461] quires only four men to maneuver it. However, it is becoming less and less popular as the resse increases in popularity.

On land, good care must be taken of the nets. After the • 227 fishing, the nets are carried up along the beach to the drying racks, long lines of poles over which the nets are spread. As they dry the master checks them, looking for holes which he immediately sews with a wooden bobbin and cotton thread. [824] The nets are hand-woven of cotton, and dyed in water in which the bark of the red mangue has soaked. This turns the white cotton a dark reddish brown and protects it from the action of the salt water and the sun. A new net must be soaked in this dye every two or three days, and later every eight days.

227 The resse, abaladeira, and tarrafa are frequently woven by 286 women, and, unless worked on steadily, these nets may take [462] as long as eight months to make. With steady work a circular [461] casting net can be made in about twelve days. The women are [435] paid Cr$12,00 per box of cotton line which contains twenty-five spools of cotton thread, and it takes five boxes to make an average-size net. The other nets require heavier thread and take much longer to make. The calão and the deep net are made by men, and a year is not considered too long for the [824] manufacture of one. Piassava, a plant fiber which grows in 227 the Recôncavo, is used as line. The fishermen of Vila Recôncavo go to the southwestern part of the bay to purchase it. It

VILA RECÔNCAVO

[Town Life]

227

is very rough, though strong. Most of the men complain about it, for it cuts their hands when they are fishing and the action of salt water on the cuts inflames their hands badly.

501

There are between seventy-five and one hundred canoes in Vila Recôncavo, of all sizes, from 16 to about 50 feet long. They come from the southern part of the state, and cost between Cr$1.000,00 and Cr$6.000,00 apiece, depending on their size. They are made of vinhatico preto, a large tree [313] from which an entire canoe can be hollowed out. As the canoes grow older, they are strengthened inside by the addition of ribs. The center support (pé do banco) has a hole in it through which a mast can be stepped for sailing. The fishermen use a variety of sails, but usually a simple square sail called traquête. Four flour sacks sewn together make a passable [428] square sail. The canoes last a long time and are handed down from generation to generation. A hundred years is not an uncommon age for such a craft.

501

The majority of fishermen cannot swim well and have a great respect for the water on two counts: the water is deep, 226 which to them implies danger, and it is said to hide large, [481] man-eating fish. There are stories of three men who have disappeared in the last few years, snatched away by fish. One [825] was a baixador, and the other two fell overboard. Falling is not uncommon, for often a man steps on a small fish on the bottom of the canoe or simply slips on the wet wood, loses his balance, and goes overboard, as the canoes are narrow-beamed and unstable. In their canoes they are fearless, and will go anywhere in any weather. Severe storms which arise suddenly are ridden out in the canoe, which generally lies at anchor while the men lie under cover of the sail, peering out occasionally to see if the weather is clearing. Many of them, [164] however, become violently ill on a larger boat during a storm.

226

Winter is the most productive season for fishing, although the most uncomfortable. There are many storms, and the [221] rains are more or less constant. But the fishermen say that [132] the mixture of salt water with the fresh water from small rivers emptying into the bay seems to produce many more fish than in the summer months. The fishermen dress only in a [291] pair of shorts and a straw hat wher fishing, and remain in the [164] cold rain for hours on end. Colds are common among them, as is rheumatism among the older men.

226
43

There is always a market for fish. There is a discussion currently going on in Vila Recôncavo, for some of the older